

Intercultural Autoethnographies

Voices of South African Gen Z



Edited by

Claude-Hélène Mayer

Alyssa Govender

Present Raymond Ramalepe

Intercultural Autoethnographies

An enlightening journey into intercultural identities that inspires a clearer picture of a whole community's struggles and resilience.

—*Clifford H. Clarke,*
University of Hawaii, Manoa, USA, retired in Kyoto, Japan

The power of positive reflexivity shines through in these Gen Z South African intercultural narratives to convey a strong message of hope despite so many challenges... positive autoethnography at its best!

—*Freda Gonot-Schoupinsky,*
School of Psychology, Faculty of Health & Wellbeing, University of Bolton, UK

Intercultural Autoethnographies: Voices of South African Gen Z

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Editors

Claude-Hélène Mayer is a Professor in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. She is a Semester at Sea Alumni (SASFA22) and a Board Member of the International Academy of Intercultural Research (IAIR). She is a Senior Editor for the Europe's Journal of Psychology (EJOP), an Associate Editor for Frontiers in Psychology (Positive Psychology) and for the International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management (IJCCM). She holds Doctoral degrees in Psychology, Management and Cultural Anthropology. Her *Venia Legendi* is in Psychology with focus on Work, Organisational and Cultural Psychology (Europa Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany).

Her research areas include transcultural mental health, salutogenesis, transcultural conflict management and mediation, women in leadership, shame and love across cultures, The Fourth Industrial Revolution and psychobiography. She is the winner of the William B. Gudykunst Book Award 2023, awarded by the IAIR, and the winner of two Silver Nautilus Awards (with special honours for academic rigor), one together with six other editors.

She is a licenced systemic family therapist and facilitator in family therapy (SG, Germany), constellation facilitator (KI), mediator and mediation facilitator (BM 2001–2021), hypnotherapist (TIM) and coach in private practice. Since 2005, she has been advising companies on leadership, global team and organisational management, intercultural competence, diversity and conflict management, as international consultant.

Alyssa Govender is a 23-year-old student pursuing a Master's degree in Industrial Psychology. She is to become a registered Industrial Psychologist and work in the industries of sports and engineering to bring about awareness on mental health and well-being, adopting advanced technologies as well as the importance of team dynamics and cohesion. She aspires to work with professionals across the world to engage in cross-cultural interactions that will allow her to gain different perspectives.

She is an individual grounded in curiosity and learning. Life-long learning and improvement from viewing reality through a different lens and the lens of others is what motivates her to make a change in the world. It is what drives her to think in ways that others do not and ask the questions which others may hesitate to. She is driven by innovation and creativity and excited to show the world what she has to offer not only as a professional but also simply just as normal her.

Present Raymond Ramalepe is currently a full-time master's student at the University of Johannesburg, pursuing a Master of Commerce in Industrial and Organisational Psychology. His previous qualifications comprise a BA in Psychology (cum laude) and honours in Industrial and Organisational Psychology (cum laude) from Nelson Mandela University. His research areas and focus include a keen interest in psychobiography, the field of psychoanalysis, leadership, psychological testing and assessment, personnel psychology, culture and workplace dynamics and career counselling and development. For his practice and approach to life, he is deeply rooted in Immanuel Kant's ideology, advocating to 'act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end'.

About the Contributors

Divan de Beer is an Industrial Psychology master's student at the University of Johannesburg. Over the past few years, he has studied at various institutes where he completed multiple degrees and a postgraduate diploma in business management. He has always been an eager learner trying to put himself in the best possible situations to learn new things. Besides his passion for learning, he is a fan of a wide range of sports since he grew up playing golf, rugby, cricket and many more. He is also very family-orientated. His culture is that of the Afrikaner, as he was raised Afrikaans and most of the elements of his culture are still very prevalent in his life. Although he does not think that many traditions form the basis of his culture, he believes what makes Afrikaners who they are is their strong passion and resilience in life.

Corli Delport is almost 27-year-old female of white ethnicity in South Africa. Her name comes from a grandmother whose middle name was Cornelia. Over the years, her demeanour has evolved from being shy to outgoing and sociable. She was born and raised in Pretoria, Gauteng, in a family of five. Although she loves nature and the tranquillity it brings, the city offers a sense of excitement and bustling dynamics. She enjoys playing field hockey and other extracurricular activities in a team format. Her interest in sports and music continued into her third year at university while completing a communication studies degree. Thereafter, her career focus shifted and it became clear that her education and work experience would guide her to become an aspiring industrial psychologist. She completed an undergraduate qualification at the North West University and thereafter pursued her postgraduate studies at the University of Johannesburg.

Ayanda Zona Nikita Dlova is currently completing her Master of Commerce in Industrial Psychology degree at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. She is a registered student psychologist and student psychometrist with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. She holds a Bachelor of Commerce honours degree specialising in Industrial and Organisational Psychology from Nelson Mandela University. Her involvement in student politics and leadership granted her the opportunity to lead in strategic positions in the student political space at UFS. She was the 2020/2021 Institutional Student Representative Council: Deputy President General at the UFS, concurrently holding the position of Campus Student Representative Council: Secretary on the Bloemfontein campus for the 2020/2021 term. She was also the 2019/2020 Secretary for the Economic

Freedom Fighters Students' Command on the Bloemfontein campus. Finally, she is a Humanitarian and an Activist for human rights and societal issues (advocating for the empowerment of women and the youth).

Liandré Llewelyn Gibson is an only child, born and raised in Pretoria, South Africa. She currently enrolled in a master's degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. She has always enjoyed swimming and experiencing new things. After high school, she pursued an academic career in creative communication. She believes that the way in which the message is communicated adds to its meaning beyond the linguistic understanding. She has supported this belief by furthering her studies in commerce with the intention of pursuing brand and image development for clients. Her career has spanned multiple industries and positions as a coach, a broker, a marketing coordinator, an import coordinator, a medical assistant and a human resource manager in a learning and development company. As an older student, she realises the value of learning on the job, learning from others and being open to new opportunities and change.

Tessa Hiscock was born and raised in Gqeberha, formally known as Port Elizabeth, in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. At the time of writing, she was 26 years old and completing her master's degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. Her academic journey began at Nelson Mandela University, where she obtained her undergraduate degree in Human Resources Management and her honours degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology. She was drawn to the field of industrial and organisational psychology due to its subject matter as she believes the application of psychological principles in the workplace is extremely beneficial. Within the profession, her interests lie in organisational development and change management, team dynamics, leadership, job crafting and employee well-being. She aims to influence the changing landscape of the workplace and helps individuals realise their true potential.

Eliza Sibongile Kabulu is a full-time Industrial Psychology master's student at the University of Johannesburg. She is an Aspiring Industrial Psychologist who would like to contribute to the science and practice of the discipline. She enjoys putting much of her time into understanding the role of influence in workplace behaviour and has developed an interest in entrepreneurship. Her dissertation topic is 'The role of personality in self-presentation tactics'. The main idea behind the study is to understand the different ways people present themselves and how these impressions affect their ability to function well in their day-to-day work activities. The study also aims to account for how impressions can be deceptive or honest and how both types of impression affect the employees and their contexts differently.

Sanele Buhle Cyril Khanyile completed his undergraduate studies and pursued an honours degree at the University of South Africa, further deepening his

understanding of his discipline and punctuated by moments of self-discovery and intellectual revelation. Currently, he finds himself engrossed in the pursuit of knowledge once again, pursuing his master's degree at the esteemed University of Johannesburg. Here, in a community of scholars and thinkers, he challenged to push the boundaries of his understanding and contribute meaningfully to his field. Throughout his educational journey, personal interactions and experiences have served as powerful motivators, shaping the way he reasons and perceives the world. Each encounter, whether in the classroom or beyond, has enriched his understanding of cultures and inspired him to strive for excellence in all endeavours. His journey is ongoing, fuelled by a passion for learning and a dedication to making a meaningful impact wherever life may lead.

Ronald Machingambi is a master's student at the University of Johannesburg majoring in the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology in South Africa. In addition, he holds a Bachelor of Commerce honours degree in Industrial Psychology from the University of Mpumalanga which he passed cum laude. He also holds an undergraduate degree with a specific focus on the fields of Human Resources and Industrial Psychology (North-West University). His research areas of interests include the study of the interaction of workers with technology in organisations as well as employee performance.

During his undergraduate studies, he excelled as the SABPP Academic Officer in 2019 and Community and Stakeholder Officer in 2020, at North-West University. He led initiatives for students' professional growth in Human Resources and Industrial Psychology, organised workshops and networking events and fostered community engagement through projects and outreach programmes, demonstrating his leadership, integrity and commitment to social responsibility.

Yaseera Mayet is an Industrial Psychology master's student at the University of Johannesburg, with a passion to understand human behaviour by leveraging well-being for organisational effectiveness. Throughout her academic journey, she has been captivated by how psychology principles can be used to address challenges in organisational contexts. During her honours year, she had the opportunity to research whether there is a relationship between generational differences in cultural values. It was a great honour and privilege that received a distinction. She actively involved in organisations such as the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa and networking with emerging industrial psychologists. Outside her academic life, she enjoys exploring new places, tasting new foods and absorbing the richness of culture in South Africa. She has driven to make a positive impact in organisations by using her knowledge to allow people to be more motivated and productive.

Olebogeng Tshiamo Namane is currently completing her Master of Commerce in Industrial Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. She started her journey in Industrial Psychology at North-West University by completing her Bachelor of Arts in Industrial and Organisational Psychology with Labour Relations

Management and completed her Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Industrial Psychology with Stellenbosch University. She is passionate about well-being and is looking forward to growing her career with the well-being of mineworkers in South Africa. As a lifelong learner, she enjoys learning about different ethnicities, cultures and beliefs.

Tsholofelo Eugenia Nkhuna is the second-born daughter of three children of Kesaobaka Mirriam Kepadisa (nee Mhele). Post-matric, she completed a diploma in Information Technology (IT). It was during her internship that she realised IT was not for her. She took a job in administration while she tried to figure out what career path to follow. In an effort to increase her income and keep her busy, she took a part-time job in a retail company where she worked during the weekends. She maintained the two jobs for three years until she was registered for her undergraduate degree in communications. She holds an Honours degree in Industrial Psychology, a postgraduate diploma in Business Management, and is currently pursuing her master's in Industrial Psychology.

Denise Oldewage is a 31-year-old white female who started her academic journey later in life. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she completed her BCom degree in Industrial Psychology through UNISA (University of South Africa) which was online, making it easier to juggle work and university. During exams in second year, she broke her wrist, and in her third year, she broke her hip and was on crutches for six months. After graduating cum laude, she decided to complete her honours with the University of Johannesburg, which was highly recommended for its industrial psychology course. Again, she completed her honours with distinction, and after a gruelling master's selection process, she was admitted to the very competitive and challenging master's industrial psychology programme. Currently, she is a registered student psychologist and in the process of finishing her coursework and dissertation by the end of the year.

Siphesinhle Nombuso Shiba, born and raised in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, is a driven individual with a passion for education, social impact and creativity. Currently, pursuing her master's degree at the University of Johannesburg, she has established herself as a dedicated scholar and leader. Her academic journey began at the University of Witwatersrand, where she completed her undergraduate studies with distinction, majoring in Industrial Psychology and Media Studies and further completing her Honours degree in Industrial and Organisational Psychology.

Beyond her academic pursuits, she is deeply involved in community development and philanthropy. As the project manager of the Mpho Ya Le Thabo Foundation, she actively works to uplift and empower marginalised communities, demonstrating her dedication to social change. She was nominated for the FierceWomenSA award in 2023, highlighting her impact and influence as a young leader. She finds joy in being God's vessel, sharing her faith and spirituality.

Lanika Stanley lives in Johannesburg and she is pursuing her MCom in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. She has an interest in understanding and enhancing employees' work environments to be able to improve the quality of work life. Experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic as a student has highlighted the significance of the industrial–organisational psychology field for her. She believes the South African context offers an exquisite and challenging setting in which to apply her knowledge and broaden her understanding. Her long-term goal is to relocate overseas to practise her profession on an international level.

Sherwen Kagisho Tshitlho was born and raised in Bloemfontein in a family that cherished one another. From Grade 5 to the present, she has been dedicated to playing the violin, which has become a significant part of her life. She attended Navalsig High School, where her passion for music flourished, and she actively participated in the Bochabela String Orchestra, travelling touring Germany, Austria and Switzerland over the years. In 2013, when she was in Grade 11, she embarked on a transformative journey as an exchange student, travelling abroad for a year. This experience, along with touring with her orchestra, broadened her horizons, teaching her resilience and cultural appreciation. After returning home, she pursued higher education and now she is a master's student in Industrial Psychology. Her academic journey and musical pursuits have continued to intertwine, as she performs with her orchestra, finding balance and fulfilment between the two.

Rebecca White is 25 years old, and she grew up on the coast of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Durban is full of rich cultures and experiences, and she spent a majority her school years deeply involved with the Indian and isiZulu cultures which are predominant in the area. She considers herself a South African European, where her lineage descends from Scotland, England and France. That line is, however, quite distant, and her family does not necessarily carry any traditions stemming from those countries. Therefore, having grown up in South Africa, she sometimes experiences a slight cultural crisis as she does not know how to label her own specific culture. She follows the Christian religion, from which most of her family's traditions initially come. She believes there is more culture to discover in South Africa and she would love to open herself to different cultural experiences throughout the course of her work and personal life.

Michelle Zerbe is an Industrial and Organisational Psychology master's student from Krugersdorp, Gauteng, South Africa. With 13 years of teaching and management experience, she has a strong passion for working with people and believes in embracing challenges for personal growth. She has held various roles in education, including as a departmental head in the Gauteng Department of Education, where she taught English Home Language, Tourism and Life Orientation. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts in Humanities and a Bachelor of Arts Honours in Psychology, a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, a Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Industrial and Organisational

Psychology, and she is currently pursuing an MCom in Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. Her career showcases her dedication to education and her commitment to helping others reach their full potential.

Preface

Is it not the dream of every teacher to engage students in their learning processes? Assigning students the reflective task of writing autoethnographic narratives that integrate classroom concepts with their life experiences in transitioning cultures is one way of achieving that engagement. This book is a collection of 20 graduate students' personal stories that reveal cultural processes of discovery, adaptation and integration among the diversity of cultures in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Slovakia and Germany. These cultures include the Xhosa, Swati, Motswana, Pedi, Tsonga, Zulu, white, Indian, Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Afrikaans, coloured (mixed white, black or Asian) and one Shona person from Zimbabwe. They came to the University of Johannesburg from all corners of South Africa and Zimbabwe; therefore, their cultural transitions included moving from traditional rural communities into the larger and modern Johannesburg.

Many students mentioned the unifying 'rainbow culture' of South Africa. They found in the rainbow culture a pervasive openness and inclusion in their social relations across cultures. They wrote about their shared South African cultural values, such as the importance of family, respect for all human beings, harmony, compassion, empathy, resiliency, collaboration and humility. They also found significant differences in how some cultural behaviours were performed, such as the rites of passage into maturity, dress, food, music, dance for different occasions, marriage celebrations, funerals and in balancing traditions with modern legal systems in their workplaces. When examining the cultural diversities found in their lives, some experienced incidents of discrimination. However, when acting on inspirations of compromise and harmony, they would seek through exploring and understanding cultures to heal divisions and to create resolutions within their community, across cultures and nations while abroad in Germany and Slovakia. Students deeply reflected on cultural conflicts in their own families and psychologically in their own personality development.

Reading of their discoveries along paths of intercultural identity development, their struggles and how they incorporated what their teacher had taught them in class and what they had learnt from each other in class, was enlightening. This experience in autoethnographic reflections was the crowning experience of the class through which both the students and teacher learnt, revealing and fulfilling insights as to how theory and practice are unified in such learning processes.

This work has personal meaning for me because I remember from earlier in life how my great-grandfather in the mid-19th century influenced my life's trajectory. I grew up in Japan with missionary grandparents and parents in a traditional

Southern Baptist family among ‘uncles, aunts and cousins’ in other missionary families across the country. In my teens, I was surprised to experience my parents’ judgemental attitudes towards locals because they were not followers of Christ. In fact, my parents and grandparents loved the Japanese, but it was their role to ‘win them to the Lord’. My great-grandfather was also a missionary in Ogbomosh, Nigeria (1854–1858) and travelled around Yoruba Land as a medical support staff for health centres. He approached the Yoruba people with a desire to serve in their well-being and truly valued their culture, about which he learnt a great deal. He practised ethnography throughout his journeys. Professor JA Atanda (University of Ife) was impressed by my ancestor’s contributions to Nigeria and edited a book based on Clarke’s notes for an unpublished memoir of those four years. Once again, I read the biography of my great-grandfather (WH Clarke), titled ‘Travels and Explorations through Yorubaland’. From this book, I learnt the importance of treating different cultures with the utmost respect by exploring, examining and reflecting on both our differences and similarities across cultures. I began reflecting on my many years in Japan and why I had committed to becoming a cultural bridge between Japan and the United States early in my life.

I hope that readers of these autoethnographic narratives – written by students from Professor Claude-Hélène Mayer’s master’s class at the University of Johannesburg – may be inspired to take a fresh look at how representatives of different cultures interact with each other and perhaps find within themselves new insights from their own life experiences as I did. It is worth reading a second time, as I shall do.

Clifford H Clarke, Kyoto, Japan, 2024

Acknowledgements

This book project is based on the collaborative efforts of many contributors. A dedicated publisher gave us the freedom to explore the field of intercultural autobiographies of young adults in South Africa; three academic editors inspired by the vision of Professor Claude-Hélène Mayer and numerous scholars from South Africa put their time, energy and heart into writing and delivering complex intercultural autobiographies which touch on the contemporary complex situations of intercultural encounters in South Africa. Reviewers also volunteered their time and expertise to refine the product and copy editors worked on the detailed process of publishing an extraordinary book.

We would like to thank all the scholars, professionals and colleagues who have contributed to the publication of this book. Furthermore, we would like to thank Mrs Ruth Coetzee, our South African language editor, for the rigorous language editing and Mr Clifford H Clarke, a dear colleague and pioneer in the intercultural field from the United States and Japan.

We hope readers will join us on our journey through the autobiographical stories, experiences and emotions from different sociocultural perspectives and will enjoy reading the different accounts, as much as we enjoyed writing and compiling them.

Thank you.

The editors in Texas, USA and Johannesburg, South Africa 2024

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Chapter 1

Introduction

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Abstract

The first chapter of this book is the introduction to “Intercultural Autoethnographies: Voices of South African Gen Z”. The chapter gives a brief description of the complexities of the South African context during the Post-Apartheid era. It further provides a short insight into autoethnography, its process and its cultural and intercultural aspects. Finally, the authors introduce the content of the chapters and authors of this book briefly.

Keywords: Autoethnography; intercultural autoethnography; intercultural narrations; life stories; South Africa; rainbow nation; post-apartheid; identity; autobiography

1. Introduction

The aim of this book is to present intercultural autoethnographies of Gen Z individuals’ cultural and intercultural experiences in South African society from a variety of sociocultural, economic, political and societal perspectives. The various chapters provide insight into the lives of young adults in South Africa in the 21st century who come from different sociocultural backgrounds, contexts and perspectives. The authors describe selected aspects and experiences of their lives with special regard to cultural and intercultural impacts, behaviours and emotions.

In this introductory chapter, the editors touch on the topics of autoethnography, the process of autoethnography and its cultural and intercultural aspects. A short introduction to the South African cultural context is provided.

2. Intercultural Experiences in Post-apartheid South Africa

Sociocultural changes can be characterised by their nature in shifting societal behaviours and functions from one specific circumstance to another (Matondang & Zariyati, 2023). It is through these changes in social and cultural contexts that new environments and conditions are established for the individuals of a particular society (Hayem, 2017; Matondang & Zariyati, 2023). Furthermore, profound changes and transitions play a role in making an imprint and causing a group of individuals to progress to a different stage (Rocher, 1992).

The rise of sociocultural shifts calls for entire social systems, institutions and groups to alter their normative behaviours, beliefs and standards in order for generations to become assimilated into new dynamic structures and additionally become moulded by the new change occurring (Kdkasi, 2018). However, this adjustment in perceptions and attitudes results in new advancements and the creation of new societal needs, foundations and associations (de la Sablonnière et al., 2013; Kdkasi, 2018). The need for social and cultural change is driven by the collective needs fought for united groups in order to challenge current inequalities and conflict and overcome these obstacles to achieve a measure of safety, protection and improvement for these communities and the environment (Kdkasi, 2018; Rabie, 2016).

The establishment of an apartheid government system in 1948 in South Africa culminated in the rise of a country and its people being shaped by ruthless and long-standing segregation, violence and frustrations (de la Sablonnière et al., 2013; Hayem, 2017; Maake, 1992). Following a series of dramatic and drastic social movements, the inauguration of Nelson Mandela in 1994 as the first African president of South Africa signalled the fall of an oppressive apartheid system – and the beginning of a new challenge to rebuild a unified nation (de la Sablonnière et al., 2013; Finchilescu & Treudou, 2010; Hino et al., 2018).

This need for unity introduced the slogan ‘The Rainbow Nation over South Africa’, which served as a reminder and message of hope in which the priorities of establishing a society by joining various distinct racially and cultural groups became a necessity in achieving a transformation and reinvention of culture, perspectives and subsequent attitudes (Barber, 2001; de la Sablonnière et al., 2013). However, the manner in which the individuals of the post-apartheid society experienced and reacted to new situations differed based on their exposure to and level of cultural disparities (Hino et al., 2018).

The post-apartheid era in South Africa was marked as a transition period in which the citizens of the new age were met with the potentialities of equality and equity (Barber, 2001; Hino et al., 2018). This enforced the need for South Africans to decompress from what was their norm, to now embrace the possibilities of experiencing a world in which they were able to pursue prevailing communal values, prospects and fortunes (Barber, 2001; Rabie, 2016). At this stage, South

Africa's greatest strength and wealth was positioned in its history of rich diversity (Barber, 2001; Hino et al., 2018; Rabie, 2016).

Since the dawn of a new reality, South Africa has made significant efforts to provide and improve in the social, economic and political branches of its people by righting the wrongs of apartheid (Phaswana, 2021). The collapse of the apartheid regime opened up the doors for transformation on a wide level, in which the common goal was to enhance the promotion of gender and racial equality through the creation of government-supported policies and legislation (Hino et al., 2018; Phaswana, 2021; Rabie, 2016). These legislative strides were directed at reducing, and ultimately eradicating, the lingering repercussions and outcomes of a hostile and oppressive environment (Phaswana, 2021; Rabie, 2016).

The post-apartheid government aimed to establish and monitor various commissions all driven by the purpose of advancing the experiences and vulnerable groups (Barber, 2001; Hino et al., 2018; Rabie, 2016). The Commission for Gender Equality was created to ensure that the promotion of gender equality was strengthened in the public and private sectors by reinforcing policies that protected the rights of all genders (Phaswana, 2021). Furthermore, the Office for the Status of Women was established in 2007, which later became the Ministry of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities in 2019. Its priorities were set to advance and promote development of previously vulnerable groups and communities in order to amplify the voices and experiences of those who had not been given the opportunities for domestic growth and socio-economic development (Kdkasi, 2018; Phaswana, 2021). These were the few initiatives that became a reality in the new age of South African history, advancing the stories and lives of many who would not otherwise have been given platforms for restructure and reform.

South African-based autobiographies have provided the context and basis for varied histories and stories to be shared through a series of descriptive and self-representative forms of literature and experiences, to narrate and account for the diversified personal anecdotes of the broader public (Ngwenya, 2020). South Africans continue to struggle with the aftermath of colonialism and the overwhelming endowments of apartheid which are reflected in many of the historical documents and texts that depict the series of past events of this country (Grzeda, 2015). It is for this reason that multiple different stories and experiences of Gen Z and those who experienced the apartheid regime are now able to launch the voices of many speakers who are the narrators of a more holistic and redefined South Africa (Grzeda, 2015). Through these autobiographies, emotions and experiences are acknowledged in divergent realities while also shifting the world view into one that places the lens on the interconnections between ethnic, racial, gender and linguistic differences of South Africans to achieve a sense of independence and nationhood (Grzeda, 2015; Ngwenya, 2000; Ngwenya, 2020).

3. Autoethnography

Autoethnography has emerged as a compelling method, widely used in the examination of social phenomena, of leveraging the researcher's personal experiences

as a lens through which to understand and analyse individual experiences (Wall, 2016). Before its introduction, scholars were troubled by the limitations of traditional research, and autoethnography was, therefore, used to challenge the way research was previously conducted (Ellis et al., 2011). Ellis et al. (2011) elaborate that scholars shifted to autoethnography to address the criticisms of canonical research methodologies, purposively aiming to produce research that is meaningful, accessible and empathetic, grounded by diverse personal experiences and identities. During this time, autoethnography gained awareness due to its focus on challenging the notion of research as impartial and objective instead embracing subjectivity. For example, this type of research allowed researchers to determine who, what, when, where and how to conduct their research (Ellis et al., 2011).

Until the present day, autoethnography has transformed into an academic research technique that is reflexive and subjective in nature (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2023). It is recognised as a qualitative methodology that allows authors to introspectively consider their roles, insights, perceptions and emotions in the context of their research pursuits (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2023). Anderson (2006) highlights that autoethnography is self-narrative and embraces the subjectivity of human experiences. By centring on the researcher's personal narrative, it recognises that interpretations of social phenomena are influenced by individual viewpoints and backgrounds.

According to Adams and Herrmann (2020), autoethnography consists of three intertwined components: 'auto', 'ethno' and 'graphy'. In their research, the authors elaborate on how each of these elements contributes to the overall meaning of the concept. 'Auto' corresponds to the individual self, encompassing personal identity and unique life experiences. 'Ethno' pertains to culture, highlighting the collective beliefs, traditions and practices shared by a specific group or community. Finally, 'graphy' involves the portrayal and interpretation of these experiences, using various methods such as storytelling or visual representation. By combining these three elements, autoethnography allows researchers to explore and represent the cultural dynamics and experiences of a group or community through their own subjective lens (Adams & Herrmann, 2020).

Wall (2016) further proposes that subjective encounters are often considered to provide innovative and distinct opinions, presenting an opportunity to make a unique contribution to the realm of social science. Moreover, Cooper and Lilyea (2022) mention in their research that ethnographers typically direct their attention not only towards understanding the context but also towards investigating a specific social issue. For example, in McLaurin's (2003) narrative of her evolving beliefs regarding homosexuality, she explicitly highlights a transformative moment, describing it as 'a profound turning point in my life', stemming from her encounter and subsequent friendship with a lesbian individual. Likewise, Carano (2013, cited in Cooper & Lilyea, 2022) shares the narrative of his developing cross-cultural understanding during his tenure as a Peace Corps volunteer, where he encountered moments of cultural disorientation.

Since autoethnography has gained in popularity, various approaches to conduct autoethnography have been developed (Adams & Herrmann, 2020)

and many different topics have been addressed in autoethnography and different disciplines have been connected with autoethnography such as leadership studies (Deckers, 2021) or mental health issues (Tillmann, 2009). Additionally, several handbooks and major reference works have been published, such as the 'Handbook of autoethnography' (Adams et al., 2016) or Chang's (2016) 'Autoethnography as a method'. Some of the major reference works highlight specific methodological approaches: Beattie (2024), for example, promotes the concept of symbiotic autoethnography, while Hernandez et al. (2022) present the approach of transformative autoethnography which focuses on autoethnography as a practice-orientated tool of transformation and self-reflexivity. Additionally, several autoethnographic books have published autoethnographical stories, especially of identity transformation (Grant & Lloyd-Parker, 2024; Mayer & Wolting, 2016).

A recent trend in autoethnography brings together positive psychology and autoethnography and thereby aims at integrating health research and positive psychology approaches and autoethnography (Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2023; Li, 2025). This new approach focuses on positive and transformative aspects in life to maintain mental health and well-being (Mayer & Gonot-Schoupinsky, 2024). Other, previous approaches have focused especially on narrations and autoethnographical stories of individuals from different countries to explore identity development, turning points and transformation through cultural experiences in different parts of the world (Mayer & Wolting, 2016).

Nevertheless, autoethnography is used to address the deficiency in traditional research methods by explicitly incorporating the researcher's personal perspective, which is often overlooked or marginalised in conventional approaches (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022; Gonot-Schoupinsky et al., 2023). Cooper and Lilyea (2022) also reveal that numerous readers are captivated and deeply affected by the power and significance of autoethnography, often finding it to be a compelling and resonant approach that elicits strong emotional and intellectual responses. This highlights the importance of autoethnography in providing a unique and nuanced understanding of social phenomena by incorporating the researcher's personal experiences, perspectives and reflections.

Even though Ellis et al. (2011) acknowledge some of the critiques associated with autoethnography, such as being too artistic without scientific rigour, or using an overly scientific approach without sufficient attention to artistic elements, they note that these critiques stem from a genuine comparison between the traditional or canonical research and the subjective experiences of ethnographers. They also argue that autoethnographers believe that research can encompass aspects of rigour and analysis, as well as emotions and therapeutic dimensions, in addition to social and personal phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). Ellis and Bochner (1996, cited in Méndez, 2013) challenge the notion of self-limitation in autoethnography with the question: 'If culture circulates through all of us, how can autoethnography be free of connection to a world beyond the self?' Méndez (2013) advocates for autoethnography as being unique and providing rich data and new insights. Alternatively, Richards (2008) recognises another benefit, perceiving autoethnography as emancipatory discourse.

4. The Process of Autoethnography

Autoethnography, as a methodology, combines characteristics of both autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011). Walker (2017) conceptualises autobiography as an account of an individual's life narrated by the author, whereas Hammersley (2018) considers the definition of ethnography as difficult and complex, due to its significant variations in nature, indicating fundamental divisions existing behind them. However, Naidoo (2012) explores the definition of ethnography as the investigation of individual beliefs, social interactions and behaviours.

First, in the process of writing an autoethnography, the author or researcher reflects upon their past experiences in a retrospective and selective manner (Ellis et al., 2011). Various researchers cited in Ellis et al. (2011) maintain that autoethnography typically focus on 'epiphanies' which serve as pivotal moments believed to have deeply affected the course of a person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Couser, 1997). These are times of existential crisis that prompt individuals to reflect on and examine their lived experiences and occasions that transform their perceptions of life thereafter.

Second, researchers explore ethnography which analyses the characteristics of culture (Maso, 2001). This involves not just the physical objects and customs of a community but also the intangible aspects, including language, ceremonies, rituals and perspectives on the world. Baecker (1997) maintains that culture serves as both a repository of collective memory and a mechanism for social control in society, offering guidelines for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Baecker, 1997). Culture emerges from a particular region or designated area (Naik et al., 2023). These specific geographical contexts shape how the individuals think, feel and behave, influencing the collective identity of the community (Naik et al., 2023).

Through an analysis of autobiography and ethnography, *autoethnography* emerges, enabling authors to look back and selectively document epiphanies arising from their cultural connections or particular cultural identities (Ellis et al., 2011). These experiences contribute to the formation of intercultural insights and understandings, fostering a deep understanding of the complexities inherent in cultural interactions and dynamics.

5. Intercultural Autoethnographies

Gonot-Schoupsky et al. (2023) recently observed that autoethnography needs to move into the field of positive autoethnography to emphasise positive reflexivity and create positive and constructive meaning through self-reflection and the idea of a positive and constructive focus and perspective. As highlighted in Mayer and Gonot-Schoupsky (2024, p. 2), autoethnographies which deal with culture and intercultural understanding can support individuals to understand 'the subjectivity of our realities and how we construct our own meanings based on our individual and cultural preferences'. Cultural and intercultural autoethnographies thereby provide an in-depth insight into the individual, their thoughts, feelings, meanings and even their creation of identity based on individual

familiar organisational and sociocultural influences. Thereby, autoethnographical research can foster a deep understanding of psychological development, growth and change in life (Hernandez, 2021), while at the same time increasing meaning-making in the ‘inbetween’ and ‘culture-bridging’ perspectives created by the author, the researcher and the participant, namely, the reader.

Autoethnographic accounts which have recently focused on the role of culture include, for example, the exploration of culture’s role in transformative tourism experiences (Teoh et al., 2023). Other studies highlight in particular emotions in the context of culture and autoethnography (Furnham, 1984; Furnham, 2019); they take study-abroad experiences into account to explore cultural learning and critical reflections (Foronda & Belknap, 2012; Patterson, 2015) as well as critical autoethnography and intercultural learning in language or indigenous education (Stanley, 2020). Others have used autoethnography as a tool and exercise for intercultural learning and teaching in China (Chi et al., 2022) and reflections on adaptation processes (Nguyen, 2019).

In this book, the editors and authors primarily focus on autoethnographic narrations which have been experienced by South Africa Gen Z narrators. Previous autoethnographical work has focused especially on cultural and intercultural experiences and narrations in autoethnography (Mayer & Wolting, 2016) and has particularly explored identity development, transcultural spaces and cultural contact zone influences in life (Mayer & Mayer, 2018). Autoethnography in South African contexts has focused on women’s transcultural conflict experiences (Mayer et al., 2022). Schmid (2019) has discussed autoethnography as a method of research in the South African post-apartheid context, while Dixon (2024) has recently published an autoethnographical account on criminology in South Africa from a Global North point of view. Lange and Teer-Tomaselli (2024) have worked on visual community autoethnography and heritage, while Perumal et al. (2021) have worked on autoethnographic experiences of South African social work educators during Covid-19. Harrison (2018) has worked on autoethnographic experiences of children of deaf parents in South Africa, while Davids (2022) has written about the experience as a ‘Muslim Coloured woman’ in Post-Apartheid South Africa. More research has been published on autoethnographies in South Africa; however, hardly any books and/or collections on South African Gen Z experiences in intercultural contexts have been published. As explained above, the contemporary South African societal context is extremely complex owing to its rich and diverse history. Cultural and intercultural autoethnographic experiences are hypercomplex and vary in nature based on situational and contextual influences.

6. About This Book

The book kicks off with the Preface, written by Clifford Clarke. It is followed by Chapter 1, the introduction to the book, written by the three editors who explain the basic concepts of autobiography, ethnography and intercultural autoethnography. In the following, Claude-Hélène Mayer narrates the autoethnographic account ‘African calling’.

In all of the narrations presented, the names of third parties mentioned are altered to either ‘artificial names’ or the authors have received consent from the third parties to mention their real names in the stories.

Chapters 3–8 present the voices of young black South African’s intercultural experiences which they experienced in different South African contexts.

In Chapters 9–11, three authors describe their experiences with South African Indian cultures from different cultural viewpoints.

In the following chapters, Chapters 12–17, English- and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans present their intercultural experiences and perspectives with their own and other cultures and how they deal with the diverse cultural norms, values and behaviours.

In Chapters 18 and 19, two authors present their experiences as South African Gen Z’s going international and abroad. These chapters contain viewpoints from two women of different cultural perspectives and thereby provide diverse insights of going abroad.

Finally, in Chapters 20 and 21, two authors provide their personal autoethnographic perspectives: they narrate their insights of what it means of living in South Africa being of foreign nationality and ethnic belonging.

We wish all of our readers new insights into the in-depth experiences of the Gen Z of South Africa regarding their intercultural learnings.

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